

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAINING OF SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS  
IN THE MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH SCHOOL DISTRICT

By

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## **Abstract**

With increasing importance placed on student growth and achievement scores, increasing teacher absenteeism, and increasing amounts of time students spend being taught by substitute teachers, it is surprising that the preparation of substitute teachers does not reflect the significance of the job they have in relation to these trends. Research shows that training can increase substitute teacher effectiveness, which may positively affect student growth and achievement. The purpose of this project was to determine what the substitute teacher onboarding process was, including employment requirements and required training, for substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District and to make recommendations to the district for the training of substitute teachers. Substitute teachers in the district were asked to complete a survey regarding their experience, current level of training, and perceived training needs. I found that regardless of the amount of experience and training substitute teachers already possess, they want more training not only in the programs and initiatives utilized by the district, but also in effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in curricular areas. While the district onboarding process is fairly comprehensive, as is the available optional training, I developed recommendations to improve the onboarding process and training options for substitute teachers in the district to strengthen substitute teacher effectiveness.

## **Description of Final Application Project**

The final product is a list of recommendations regarding substitute teacher training in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. This will include the above-mentioned correlation to the literature and suggestions for the method of delivery. It is my hope to devise a delivery plan that will be little to no cost to the district to carry out because it will use the current format of online delivery. My suggestion will be to utilize current staff to record lessons for online delivery. There is also the opportunity to offer this as a class where participants can get credit for developing and recording the lessons for substitute training. These lessons then become available to new teachers coming into the district or to any veteran teacher who feels the need to brush up on a subject.

## **Introduction**

In the aftermath of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, when schools were publicly ranked and monetary incentives paid to teachers based on high stakes test data, school districts across the nation have continued to place an increasing importance on student growth and achievement. The importance placed on the data from high stakes testing is incredibly high. Teacher planning that is data driven is becoming more commonplace as is using research-based teaching practices. Considering these trends in education, it is surprising that substitute teacher preparedness does not reflect the importance of the job substitute teachers have in helping students reach growth and achievement goals. The accumulating research and findings on what positively affect student achievement and growth is used to guide school districts in developing curriculum and choosing programs and materials that are believed to help schools attain the desired results in their data. Districts have also offered teachers professional development to

increase student engagement, classroom management, and positively increase school climate and culture to name a few. However, one area that needs to be considered is the preparation of substitute teachers and the effect they have on student growth and achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

One of the obstacles that schools face is teacher absenteeism. Teacher absenteeism is occurring at an increasing rate. Another obstacle is the lack of substitute teacher availability. It is becoming more and more difficult for schools to find substitute teachers to fill open teaching positions when a teacher is absent. The Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District published that there were 20 to 30 positions that were not filled daily in the December 2019 edition of their newsletter for substitute teachers. If a substitute is found to fill in for a teacher, the substitute may be ill equipped to teach following the curriculum or use the materials provided effectively due to a lack of preparation. The purpose of this project is to develop a list of recommended training for substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District.

### **Project Questions**

This project will show the importance of substitute teacher training and the positive effect prepared substitutes can have on students. I would like to know what major themes are prevalent in the literature regarding substitute teacher training and then use this information to construct a list of recommendations for training of substitute teachers to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. My intention is that this list will be in addition to what the District already has in place. Through this research I would like to answer the following questions: What are the effects of having a substitute teacher on students and their learning?



Are there ways to support substitute teachers? What is the extent of mandatory training substitute teachers must complete to substitute in the MSBSD? Can school and/or program specific training for substitute teachers can have a positive effect on students?

### **Rationale**

This project is needed to address the issue of substitute teacher preparedness in schools within the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. While the District mandates some training as a part of the substitute hiring process, I believe it is imperative to require more training in the core programs and initiatives adopted by the District as well as offering site specific training to equip substitute teachers for success and to maintain regular school routines for students. Thus, positively affecting student growth and achievement.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Introduction**

Substitute teachers are an integral part of the school experience for students. In fact, research has informed us that on average students spend up to an entire school year with a substitute teacher throughout their K-12 experience (Glatfelter, 2006). This may not be surprising or even alarming but when you factor in and consider the preparedness of substitute teachers, and the requirements for employment of substitute teachers by schools, it becomes another story altogether. Many schools set a high school diploma as the minimum hire requirement for substitute teacher positions (True et al., 2011). Furthermore, it was found that less than half of the substitute teachers in the nation are offered an orientation and much less, under 10%, get training for the positions they are hired to fill (Glatfelter, 2006; Minthorn, 2000; True et al., 2011). This is in severe contrast to the preparation requirements for full time

certified teachers. Not only do certified teachers need to complete an accredited university program, meet requirements mandated by states, which includes taking college classes per certification cycle, but they are also provided with continual professional development in order to keep abreast of the ever changing landscape of the education field. This discrepancy in preparedness between teachers and their substitute counterparts is partially due to districts not having the money to pay for substitute teacher training (Glatfelter, 2006 ; Minthorn, 2000) and the low priority designated by the education system to this task (Cardon, 2002; Ostapczuk, 1994).

Another discrepancy that may be cause for concern is the issue of evaluation. Certified teachers must go through a stringent process of evaluation each year. For example, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District has joined many other Districts across the nation in utilizing Charlotte Danielson's et al. Framework for Teaching Model, a research-based tool known as the Danielson Model, for teacher evaluation. The Danielson Group states on their website that the Framework for Teaching has "been validated through empirical studies as predictive of student learning as measured by state assessments" (The Danielson Group, n.d.). As part of the evaluation method, teachers must provide evidence that each component of the framework was successfully met at a basic or proficient level. In addition to this, teachers are often subjected to multiple observations throughout a school year. These include both formal observations made by the principal and informal observations made by colleagues. For the substitute teacher, evaluations and observations were rare if even existent (Minthorn, 2000). However, Minthorn (2000) found that both teachers and principals thought that substitute teachers should be evaluated regularly. One of the problems Ostapczuk (1994) listed as being

cited in the research was “the lack of feedback of, and evaluation to substitutes,” (p. 5).

Glatfelter (2006), states that, in fact, “...substitute teachers believe feedback would help them improve” (p. 62).

## **Effectiveness**

Substitute teachers need support to be effective teachers who positively affect students’ learning. Research shows that increasing substitute teacher preparedness through training greatly increases the effectiveness of the substitute as a teacher (Byer, 2008; Minthorn, 2006). In his review of several studies, Ostapczuk (1994) states that “Several studies cite poor classroom management skills as substitutes’ single greatest problem” (p. 1). Byer (2008) cites research that shows substitutes trained “...to use effective classroom management techniques and effective instructional strategies has improved students’ academic achievement” (p. 3). Furthermore, Glatfelter (2006), building on prior research which showed training of substitute teachers enhanced their self-efficacy, found that “...substitute teachers believed classroom management is the key to their success, and that effective instruction and knowledge of the curriculum are not just secondary and tertiary; rather, a mastery of these strategies strengthens classroom management” (p. 67). Another problem Ostapczuk (1994) listed as being cited in the research was “poor classroom management and disciplinary skills on the part of the substitute teacher” (p. 6). It is interesting to note that school administrators believe disciplinary skills to be their area of most concern (p. 6). One of the key themes that was evident in the literature was the idea that effectiveness is positively affected by components central to school climate and culture. Friendliness and helpfulness of staff towards the substitute, feeling welcome, feeling included in the school team, and knowledge of the school layout all help to increase job

satisfaction which in turn has a positive effect on effectiveness (O'Connor, 2009). The premise is that if a substitute has basic needs met, performance is positively impacted (Glatfelter, 2006). Furthermore, "Research consistently shows that positive student and staff perceptions of their school climate are linked to increased student academic achievement and graduation rates;" (Fishel et al., 2019) In addition, it is believed that some sort of feedback or evaluation of substitute teachers may increase their effectiveness as a teacher. O'Connor (2009) writes that feedback helped him as a school principal to increase the quality of substitute teachers working in his school.

### **Substitute Training**

The dilemma that districts and schools face is what should substitute preparation look like? Deciding what topics should be included, duration and frequency, delivery method, whether or not these are conditions of employment or offered as elective professional development, incentives for completion, and evaluation of the program are just some of the issues districts consider in developing a preparation program for substitute teachers. As previously stated, research suggests that many of these decisions will be based on availability of funding and the priority and value placed on preparing substitute teachers. In reviewing the literature about substitute teaching, Ostapczuk (1994) identified problems with substitute teaching and compiled a list of recommendations that were mentioned in the research. He ranked the recommendations according to the number of times they were mentioned in the literature he reviewed. Ostapczuk explained that he reviewed 13 sources but that 2 of the sources were specific to certain areas of study so were not represented in the recommendations. It is not surprising that the recommendation that was mentioned most

frequently was to “Provide substitute teachers with inservice training on topics such as discipline, classroom management, etc.” (p. 8). Improving the collaboration between substitute teachers and the school district and evaluating and providing feedback to substitute teachers were mentioned, respectively. Improving recruitment procedures was mentioned in 5 sources and “Provide a substitute teacher’s handbook on rules and policies” (p. 8) was mentioned in 4 sources as was “Provide role clarification and clear expectations of all substitute teachers” (p. 8). The least mentioned recommendation was to provide better lesson plans. It was mentioned in 2 sources (p. 9). Ostapczuk also shared findings from an “extensive study” by Koelling in 1983 that showed about 3/4 of 1728 school districts surveyed did not provide inservice training or “evaluation of, and feedback to substitute teachers” (p. 9). Furthermore, more than half the districts surveyed did not provide a substitute handbook. Ostapczuk (1994) surmises that “perhaps due to the sample size its findings might also have external validity throughout most of the United States” (p. 9). He also states that the problems and recommended solutions evident throughout the literature he reviewed “...are longstanding in nature” (p. 11). In contrast to using a broad view taken from a compilation of research, others have a much narrower view guiding the direction of their substitute teacher training. One such author is Robert Minthorn (2000). He published an article outlining the implementation of a substitute training program for the district in which he worked. The goal was to increase substitute teacher effectiveness while reducing any “performance related issues” (p. 28) and to reduce liability because of action by substitutes that required investigation. They surveyed key stakeholders (e.g., teachers, administrators, and substitute teachers). The responses informed them of perceived strengths and weaknesses of the current substitute teacher program (p. 30).

Next, they formed a substitute training committee which eventually resulted in the development and implementation of a substitute training program (pp. 30-38). To evaluate the success of the program they looked at the number of unsatisfactory performance reports that were made. They found that substitutes completing 10 days of training had half the rate of reports made than those who completed 3 days of training (p. 38). Another idea for the development of a substitute training program comes from a manuscript produced by the Connexions Project. This manuscript uses a theoretical framework from the literature to define four “attributes of a quality substitute teacher program and explore specific strategies that can be used to improve substitute teacher programs” (True et al., 2011). The four attributes include the selection of high quality substitute teachers; induction of the substitute in a manner that creates a feeling of “partnership” (p. 3) while giving the substitute “as much information as possible for them to do their jobs well” (p. 3); development of “pedagogical knowledge and skill” (p. 3) including effective teaching strategies to ensure student engagement, effective classroom management, and continuity of learning by learning community participation; and evaluation using feedback between principal, teacher, and substitute with the goal of improved effectiveness of the substitute teacher. Regardless of the method used, a well-executed substitute teacher program must have an evaluative piece to determine if the goals of the program are being met.

### **Program Evaluation**

In the report Best Practices in Evaluating Teacher Professional Development Hanover Research (2015) found that professional development that results in positive changes in teacher effectiveness and student results “...uses a variety of sources and types of educator,

student, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning” (as cited in Learning Forward). Additionally found was a recommendation by Brown University’s Annenberg Institute for School Reform that school improvement issues should be approached “...by using a standardized inquiry framework...” (as cited in Barnes) and that for activities in professional development, this framework assists in providing a “...consistent approach to improvement that can be duplicated in different contexts” (as cited in Haslam). The report stated that while there is a trend of increased professional development (p. 5) it is often “...ineffective in improving teacher performance.” (p. 5) Furthermore, there is a lack of objective assessment to measure the effect of professional development on teacher performance and student outcomes (p. 7). In addressing “best practices and strategies for evaluating the effectiveness of P.D” (p. 7) the report indicates that “In the past decade, three professional development evaluation models have gained popularity in the education field: the Kirkpatrick, Guskey, and Clarke-Hollingsworth models” (p. 8). The conceptualization of “teacher change” is a differing factor of these models however each model shows a chain of events that specifies “how teacher learning, student impact, and professional development activities influence each other” (p. 8). The Kirkpatrick Training Evaluation Model by Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick is a linear approach where a sequential process to teacher change exists. This model comprises 4 levels that “aims to provide a more detailed layer of assessment at each successive level” (9). The Guskey model by Dr. Thomas Guskey, founded on the Kirkpatrick model, is also a linear approach and was developed for an educational setting. This model differs from the Kirkpatrick in that change in teacher attitudes and beliefs occur through their practice and reflection of that practice rather than a change in knowledge and beliefs that occur because of acquired information (p. 9). This

model also differs from the Kirkpatrick in that it has an added level which allows for an examination of access to resources and support from the institution for teachers. This level is called “Organizational Support and Change” (p. 10). The Clarke-Hollingsworth model is a distributive model that builds on the Guskey model. In the Clarke-Hollingsworth model hierarchical levels are eliminated and domains structure the evaluation framework. Rather than following a linear path teacher change can begin with changes in any domain. The report states that while this model was not made explicitly as an evaluation model, “the Clark-Hollingsworth model of teacher growth is designated as an analytical tool that facilitates the assessment of professional development activities” (p. 11). The report discusses considerations for implementation such as Usability of the Models which speaks to summative and formative evaluations, Identifying Change Through Comparison which speaks to comparison being the primary method used to measure change and summarizes the most common types of comparisons used, and Data Collection which speaks to the process of collecting data. The report states that the 3 models “examine many of the core areas” (p. 14). The report then provides a review of “the tools and strategies used to collect data for each of the evaluation areas associated with the Gusky, Kirkpatrick, and Clark-Hollingsworth models...” (p. 14) The 5 areas reviewed include Participant Feedback, Participant Learning, Organizational Context, Application of Learning, and Student Outcomes. Regardless of the model or method used to evaluate professional development, the literature is clear, effective training programs will include an evaluative piece.



## **Theoretical Perspectives**

### **Aims and Objectives**

- To develop recommendations for the training of substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District
- To determine the training completed by substitute teachers in MSBSD
- To identify perceived training needs of substitute teachers in MSBSD
- To identify educational background and experience of substitute teachers in MSBSD

### **Methods and Methodologies**

The purpose of this project is to compile a list of recommendations for training of substitute teachers for the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. This list will be an addition to the current substitute training program. I will also provide suggestions for delivery methods for the training at little to no cost to the district. If allowed, I will familiarize myself with the extent of training that is currently available to substitute teachers in the MSBSD. I will compile a list of programs and initiatives that have been adopted by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District and are currently being used in the district. I will use this information to develop and administer a survey to MSBSD substitute teachers. The survey will consist of both qualitative and quantitative questions. Key concepts evident in the literature include substitute teacher needs for training, specifically increased knowledge in classroom management techniques and instructional strategies, perceptions of the substitute teachers, and the effectiveness of the substitute teachers as a teacher. There are several learning theories that may help to explain the relationship between training and substitute teacher effectiveness, but

the Humanistic approach seems most closely aligned to the nature of the concepts inherent in substitute teaching and training. Another theory that may explain how teacher knowledge affects student achievement is the Symbolic Interactionist Theory. This is mostly due to teacher expectations of a student possibly affecting how well a student performs. For this project I conducted applied research to develop recommendations for the training of substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. This project was exploratory research in that I explored the issue of substitute preparation. This project was descriptive research in that I described the process of substitute training in the MSBSD. This project utilized a mixed methods research design. I collected data through a survey with both qualitative (to understand opinions and experiences of respondents) and quantitative questions (for statistical data). I also collected information about the training of substitutes by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. This was a cross-sectional study. The participants completed a one time survey and there was no follow-up.

### **Limitations/Delimitations**

There are limitations to this project. First, the timing of this project was not conducive to participation of all of the substitute teachers. The District was in the midst of a new Superintendent coming on and the administrative team was meeting daily to prepare Covid-19 mitigation plans for schools opening in the fall so it took longer than anticipated to get approval to administer a survey and to get permission and access to the available training for substitute teachers. Once I had access to the training, I spent time completing the training prior to developing the survey. By the time the survey went out, summer was well underway. Another limitation is the design of the survey. I wanted the survey to be useful to me for this project of

course but I also wanted it to be useful to the District. With that in mind, and my lack of experience completing a survey at this level, I realized that the survey may have exceeded the scope of the project. The survey is long and has a few open-ended questions making it difficult to synthesize some areas of information collected from the survey. Another limitation with the survey was due to an error on my part. I was not aware that the survey would not let respondents leave a blank answer to a question so several were forced to make a selection even though it was not true of them. Some respondents did self report when this happened to them. One delimitation pertains to the district initiatives and programs. I tried to make a complete list of programs and initiatives. However, there is not a single place that I could go to to find an exhaustive list of district programs and initiatives, and I am not familiar with every district program or initiative. So, I limited my focus to programs at the elementary school level and tried to be as concise as I could. There are a few secondary programs listed but it is not a complete list. I did add a question to the survey to account for any omissions thus giving respondents an opportunity to include those programs not listed. Another delimitation to this project was not including any information about trauma-engaged practice. I think this is important because we are in the midst of a pandemic. This topic is important for all educators.

### **Application for the Field**

For this project I wanted to provide the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District with a list of recommendations for the training of substitute teachers in the district. After reviewing the literature to discover key themes in the area of substitute teacher preparation, I developed a survey to find out the extent of substitute teacher preparation in MSBSD and also to discover perceived training needs. I partnered with the Human Resources Department for the

dissemination of the survey. The survey link was sent out to 960+ email addresses and a follow up letter sent to 929 addresses. The district reported that they had a little over 300 active substitute teachers from this list. There were 51 responses to the survey. While the district employment requirement to substitute teach is a high school diploma or GED, I found it interesting that 37 of the respondents were college graduates, 17 of which were either certified or retired teachers (See Figure 1). Another thing that I found interesting was that half of the respondents have substitute taught for 3 years or less, the majority having substitute taught just one year. 30 respondents substitute teach primarily at the elementary level (See Figure 2), which is where I originally wanted to focus. It was surprising that while about half of the respondents believed that the district training requirements adequately met their training needs (See Figure 3), the same respondents said they would like more training (See Figure 4) and selected many programs and initiatives in which they desire training (See Figure 7). 14 respondents did not believe that the district training requirements met their needs (See Figure 4). When I began to look at the training available to substitute teachers offered by MSBSD I was fairly surprised. In addition to mandated training such as blood borne pathogens and child abuse reporting, substitutes must spend 3 days shadowing at a school site. The district also has a substantial amount of optional training available to substitute teachers online. Through the survey I discovered that some of the substitute teachers did not know that these were available through the MSBSD Professional Growth Resource Library. I also found that while substitutes generally felt like they were familiar with the curriculum for the grade level they substitute taught in (See Figure 5), about one-third of them didn't know how to access the district curriculum (See Figure 6). One of the things that I was happy to discover was that the majority

of the respondents are interested in site based training (See Figure 8). This is important because it goes back to school climate and culture and the substitute being able to keep school routines intact for students. Only 5 respondents said they were not interested in site based training (Figure 8). In terms of delivery of further training, the majority of respondents said they would prefer training to occur during the weekday in 2 hour blocks of time. More respondents preferred online learning while 16 preferred a blend of online and traditional face to face training. Only 12 strictly preferred traditional face to face training. This supports the recommendation for recorded training that could be accessed online. Every respondent said that they would benefit from training in effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in one or more subjects. These are important because they affect so many areas such as classroom management, substitute efficacy, and possibly student growth and achievement. In terms of training in specific programs, the respondents chose everything available. About 30% of the respondents wanted training in the core curriculum materials, Journeys and Go Math (See Figure 7), which I thought was low but a little more than that reported having training in those programs already. Interestingly, I did discover that more than half the respondents stated interest in training in the many social emotional learning programs utilized by the district while more than half stated that they had training in one or more of these programs. I thought it was interesting that only 12 respondents said they would not be interested in observing lessons being taught. About half said they would be interested in observing lessons being taught with one comment that this was the best type of training for that particular person. I think that the strength of this project is the information gathered that spoke to some of the areas needing improvement in the onboarding process. The district has

many optional training available but it doesn't do any good if people don't know it's there. Also, it would be helpful if substitutes knew how to navigate the district website and were able to locate curriculum and available training. Another strength found in the survey was the open ended questions. These questions provided another avenue that exposed areas for improvement. One of the areas is the shadowing portion of the onboarding process. A request was made for a checklist of things to cover with the trainee throughout the day of shadowing. One of the challenges of this project was developing the survey. It was difficult to include all of the district programs and initiatives because there was not a single place to locate an exhaustive list that I had discovered. Another challenge was working with the distinct personnel. Because of the change in administration and the preparation for opening school in a pandemic, people were much more busy than usual so they were less available. This slowed the progress of the project. I was also challenged with the research and review of the literature. Aside from scholarly articles, I had read many published books that spoke to teacher effectiveness, best practices and specific programs that increase student engagement to name just a few, and felt like I went down a rabbit hole so to speak which slowed the progress of the project considerably. In terms of future use of this project, in addition to the recommendations to the district, the results could be used to improve processes for substitute teachers at the school level. Also, the district may choose to adapt the survey for use in an action research project for continuous improvement in their substitute training program. If the survey is used in the future some of the questions will need to be modified to include a "none of the above" or "none" as an answer choice.

Figure 1

What is your educational background?  
51 responses



Figure 2

Where do you spend the most time substitute teaching?  
0 / 51 correct responses

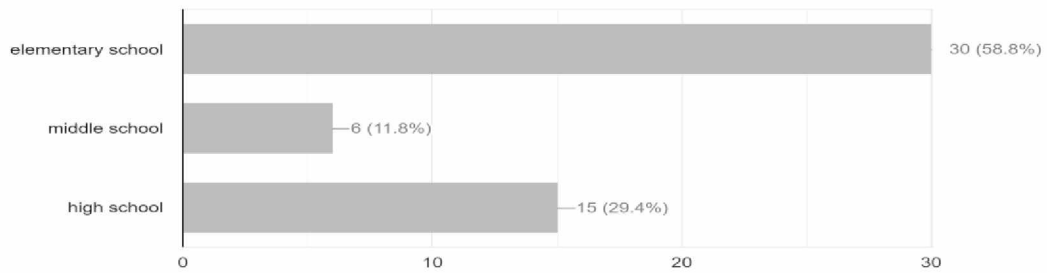


Figure 3

The current training requirements of the MSBSD adequately meet my needs as a substitute teacher.  
51 responses

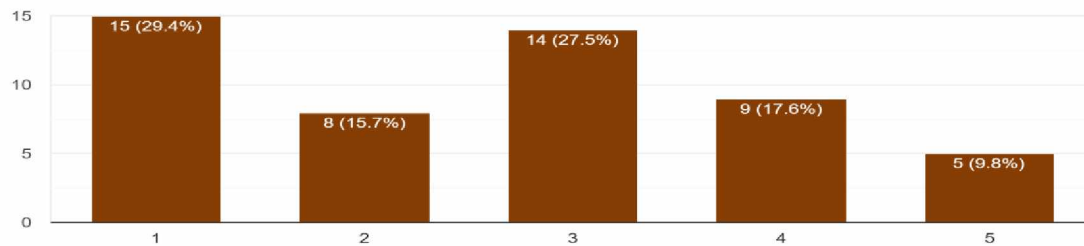


Figure 4

I would attend more training if it were available.  
51 responses

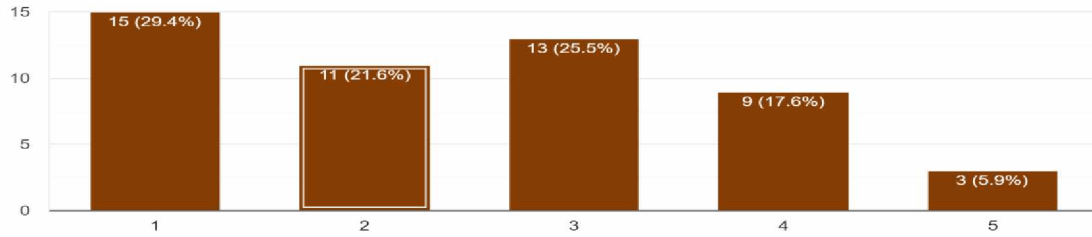


Figure 5

I am familiar with the grade specific curriculum for the grades I substitute teach.  
51 responses

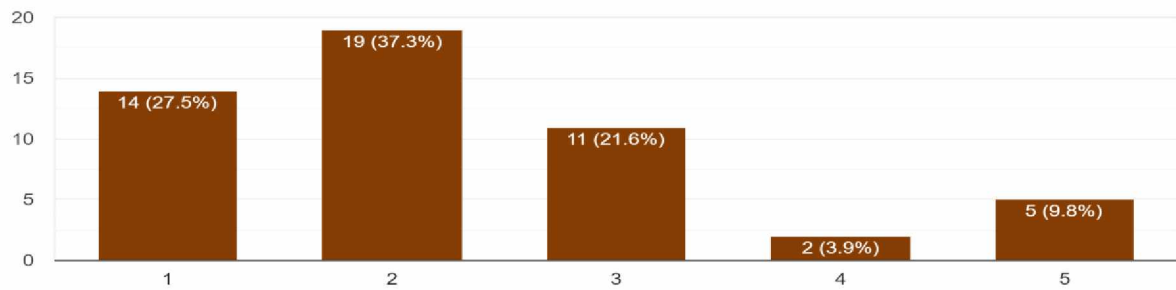


Figure 6

I know how to access the MSBSD curriculum.  
51 responses

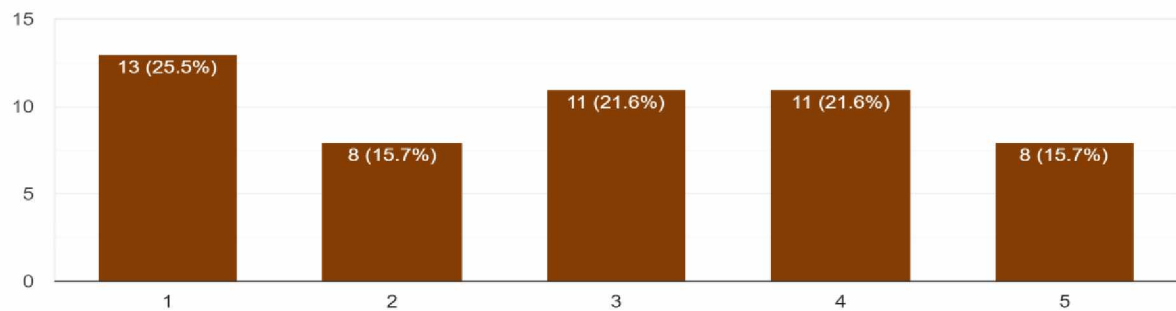




Figure 7

I would like training in the following programs: (Select all that apply)

51 responses

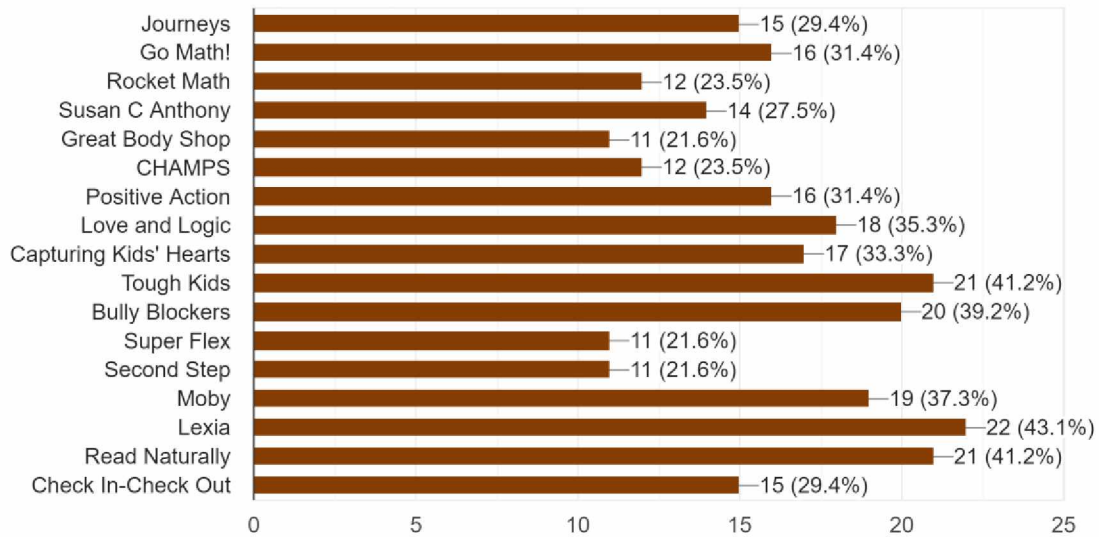


Figure 8

I would like more site based training. This is training including discipline plans and other programs and/or initiatives utilized by a school.

51 responses

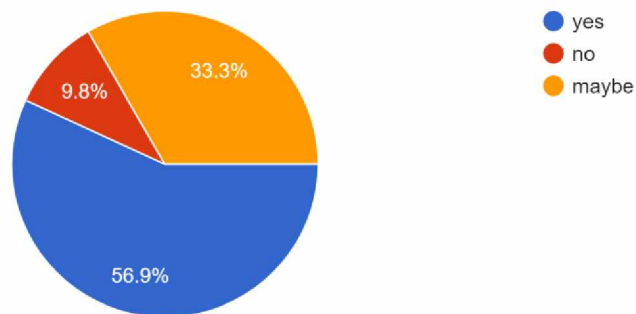
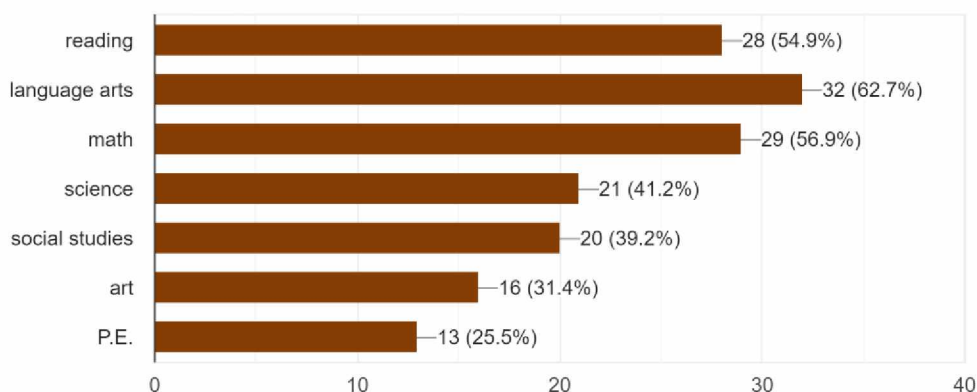


Figure 9

I would benefit from training in effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in the following areas: (select all that apply)

51 responses



### Application Reflection

The administered survey shows that substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough want more training. More than fifty percent said they wanted training in effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in both reading and math, and over sixty percent said they wanted that same training for language arts (See Figure 9). This is significant because it shows that the respondents want to improve their teaching and effectiveness as teachers. When asked to indicate the program/s that they would like training in, every single program listed was selected (See Figure 9). It is interesting that the social emotional learning had high response rates as well as the reading intervention programs. The Tough Kids program, a social emotional program, was chosen by 42 percent of respondents and Lexia, a phonics based program, was selected by 43 percent (See Figure 9). About half of the

respondents said they had training in the core math and literacy programs while half said they wanted training in these programs (See Figure 7). The significance of this is that substitutes are interested in learning more about the materials they are expected to deliver as a substitute teacher. It also shows that they care about the learning environment and have a desire to make it a safe and nurturing environment for students. Although only 7 respondents reported not being familiar with the curriculum for grades they teach (See Figure 5), 19 reported not knowing how to access the district curriculum (See Figure 6). In addition to this several respondents reported not knowing that there are training videos available through the district's Professional Growth Resource Library. These are significant because they show areas to the onboarding process that need improvement. When asked if they were interested in site based training 56.9 percent said yes and another 33.3 said maybe (See Figure 8). The significance of this is that substitute teachers want to know more about the schools they are substitute teaching in. Site based training is important because information gained through this training informs school climate and culture. Furthermore, with this knowledge a substitute is able to continue the school routines that are in place which cause less disruption to the school day for students. It also has implications for the substitutes' feeling of self efficacy. They may feel more like a part of the school team, that they are a valued member of the school, that they belong there and may exude these qualities because they are familiar with the inner workings of the school.

This project was a wonderful learning experience. I learned that there is great literature surrounding the topic of professional development and substitute preparation. My biggest takeaway from this is the confirmation that professional development is a continuous process

and that there are many different levels and depths of training for all educators: certified teachers, teacher aids, and substitute teachers. I also learned that each specific training opportunity may not be a part of a specific process or program, and it doesn't necessarily need to be in order to obtain desired outcomes including positively affecting a substitute teacher's ability to be effective. While desired outcomes may be difficult, or even impossible to measure, training opportunities could have a positive effect on student growth and achievement. In contrast to this is the idea that an effective training program should be well thought out, planned with desired outcomes for the professional development, and include an evaluative piece. I think that either model is fine as long as it meets the needs of the individuals being trained. As daunting as it may seem in the moment, I have rediscovered that I do enjoy the process of research and as a researcher I can discover data that helps inform ideas about things that I want to learn more about and change for the better. If I were to do another project, I have a better idea what the process looks like and I will be able to go through the process more fluidly. For instance, not waiting for each step to be completed before starting the next step. With this project I felt like I was on hold while the survey was being administered but now I see that there were things I could have been working on in the meantime. Also, I will be able to narrow down my review of the literature more quickly knowing how to define my purpose more easily than I had done in this project. In the beginning I became so overwhelmed with the amount of sources about teacher effectiveness and best practices, program specific information, and interrelated topics that I lost track of what my purpose was. I did the same thing reviewing the district's required training for substitute teachers. I spent a lot of time reading and reviewing sources that I am not sure directly pertains to my project or was needed

for the project to be completed. Another thing that would be different is the development of a more narrowly focused survey if one were included. The information I gathered with this survey was all very interesting to me and may be beneficial to the district, but I'm not one hundred percent sure it all fits within the purpose of my project. For example, does knowing the educational background of the respondents lend more credibility to the recommendations I make? Regardless of the changes I might make in a future project, having completed this project heightened my belief that educator- conducted research as an instrument of change has value and can assist in the endeavor to create lasting change. I think that in order to create lasting change you need to have good, solid data to justify and inform the change.

The education field is constantly changing and educators are good at constantly adapting to change. We know the reason for the change in this continuous mode of striving to be and do better is to increase positive outcomes such as graduation rates and scores that show growth and achievement. The district seems to have a substantial number of social emotional and intervention programs that aid in reaching these goals. This poses a difficulty for substitute teachers in that district schools do not implement the same programs aside from the core material for math and literacy. The district has adopted math and literacy programs that are standard throughout the district for most schools in the district. The exception here is with the numerous charter schools within the district. Having standard core material is incredibly beneficial to the transient population. This also helps teachers keep the momentum of learning for students who move between district schools. This is also beneficial for substitute teachers for several reasons. The main reason being if a substitute has training in a program such as Go

Math, they are able to walk into most elementary classrooms in the district knowing the structure of the program, which aids in the delivery of the material.

### **Conclusion**

With the increasing amount of time that students spend with substitute teachers and the decrease in availability of substitute teachers, it is more important than ever to provide substitute teachers with adequate preparation through training. Training increases the effectiveness of substitute teachers as classroom teachers. Training programs that are effective have an evaluative piece. While the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District seems to have robust training requirements, required orientation, a three day deployment with shadowing at a single school site, and optional training available, the substitute teachers in the district want more training. The training of substitutes in the district does not have an evaluative piece but the district does keep track of the completion of required training. There are issues with the district's onboarding process and there is not a clear training program for substitutes to get training in the many programs and initiatives implemented in the district. The recommendations for the training of substitute teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District, which are listed below, address the issues with onboarding and offer a concise and affordable way to address the perceived train needs of its substitute teachers.

### **Recommendations**

The survey to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District substitute teachers was distributed during the summer so the response rate was less than anticipated. This could have also been due in part to an increase in the lack of interest in substitute teaching during a pandemic. While it is difficult to remedy interest in substitute teaching during a pandemic, it is

recommended that future surveys are distributed during a time when substitute teachers are regularly checking their email, included in the onboarding process, or as a part of the yearly process substitutes go through to continue to substitute teach. Furthermore, the survey itself had design flaws with a few of the questions and with the exclusion of some programs and initiatives utilized by the district. It is recommended that these issues are addressed prior to using the survey in another project. Further study on the issue of substitute teacher preparation as it pertains to Alaska is recommended by identifying how districts across the state address substitute teacher preparation and discovering what is working well could be monumental in creating training programs that are beneficial for all stakeholders in the State of Alaska. In addition, the topic of trauma engaged practice should be addressed when developing preparation programs for all educators. This is important to Alaska not only because of the trauma caused by the current pandemic but also because of the wide range of trauma generally experienced by our children and youth.

Recommendations for Training of Substitute Teachers  
in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District

- Provide an orientation to the district website which includes showing how to access the curriculum and available optional training. For written website navigation information see Matanuska Susitna Borough School District Website Navigation for Substitute Teachers in Appendix A.
- Provide training in the core material including a program overview of each program and effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in each subject.
- Provide an orientation of each program and initiative utilized by the district such as CHAMPS and Rocket Math.
- Provide current site information on Substitute Hub.
- Provide a spreadsheet that lists program and initiative utilization by site.
- Provide site based training per school site.
- Provide training in technology used in the classroom such as SmartBoard and Promethean training.

See the Recommendations for Training of Substitute Teachers in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District Compare/Contrast Chart below for a description of the district's current practice compared to the above recommendations including a rationale for each recommendation.

I would like to suggest that the above recommendations be met with little additional cost to the district by providing an opportunity for existing staff to earn credit through a flt-focused learning team to produce videos for the above recommended orientation and training. The



district already has a partnership with the University of Alaska Anchorage PACE, Office of Professional and Continuing Education, including processes in place for offering a FLT in the district. See Appendix B for information about offering a flight. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that the district add a day to FAMS (Fall Academy in the MatSu) for substitute teachers if the budget would allow. In lieu of providing an honorarium to substitute teachers for attending FAMS training, the district could provide a way for substitute teachers to advertise the training they have completed such as in the Model Substitute Training Matrix (See Figure 10).

Figure 10

Model Substitute Training Matrix

	Journeys	Lexia	Go Math	ALEKS	MOBY	Great Body Wkshp	Check In Check Out	CHAMPS
	Language Arts/Reading		Math		On-Line Learning	Health	Behavior Mgt./Social Emotional Learning	
Substitute Name 1	8/20		8/20					8/20
Substitute Name 2	1/17	5/17	1/17		5/17		5/17	1/17
Substitute Name 3	8/18		8/18				8/18	8/18
Substitute Name 4	8/17	8/18	8/17		8/18	8/19	8/18	8/17
Substitute Name 5	5/20		5/20					5/20

This example features a model that could be utilized in Google Sheets. It includes example substitute teachers with the dates they have completed training in a sample of core and supplemental programs used by the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District. If the district were to create something like this it would provide a way for substitute teachers to showcase the training they have had and also provide schools with a way to choose substitute teachers who have had training in the programs utilized by specific school sites. Google sheets would provide the ability to include an exhaustive list of programs and initiatives utilized by the district. Also it would be a living document that could be updated as needed.

Recommendations for Training of Substitute Teachers  
in the Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District

Compare/Contrast Chart

Current MSBSD Practice	Recommendation for Improvement
<p>No MSBSD Website Orientation</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide website orientation which includes showing how to access the curriculum and available optional training-see Appendix A</p> <p>Rational: 19 respondents to the Substitute Teacher Survey disagreed that they knew how to access district curriculum and 7 respondents stated that they were not aware of the available optional training and/or the Resource Library.</p>
<p>Recorded Zoom training for New Hires in Journeys and Math available in the Teachers Lounge Professional Development tab in Recorded Training.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide training in the core material including a program overview of each program and effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in each subject in video format. Have these available in the Resource Library.</p> <p>Rational: 29% and 31% of respondents to the Substitute Teacher Survey reported that they would like training in Journeys and Go Math, respectively. Furthermore, 54%, 62%, and 56% of respondents reported that they would benefit from training in effective instructional strategies, best practices, and teaching methods in reading, language arts, and math, respectively.</p>
<p>Some information is provided in Professional Resources on the Office of Instruction page as well as in the Teachers Lounge under Teacher Links.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide an orientation of each program and initiative utilized by the district such as CHAMPS and Rocket Math. Have these available in the Resources Library.</p> <p>Rationale: Respondents to the survey reported wanting training in each of the district programs and initiatives listed in the survey. The percentage of respondents that chose a particular program ranged from 21 to 43 percent.</p>

<p>No known plan for site information updates to Sub Hub.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide current site information on Substitute Hub. Require sites to have the information updated prior to school opening and that changes be updated with 2 weeks of changes at the school site.</p> <p>Rationale: 56% of respondents said they would like on-site based training including information on discipline plans and programs and initiatives utilized by sites.</p>
<p>No known resource for substitutes to know program and initiative utilization by specific school sites.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide a spreadsheet that lists program and initiative utilization by site.</p> <p>Rationale: 56% of respondents said they would like on-site based training including information on discipline plans and programs and initiatives utilized by sites. Furthermore, some respondents reported mainly substitute teaching at the same site/s and/or classroom/s and that it would be helpful to know which programs were used at the sites they substitute teach at so they knew which training to seek.</p>
<p>3 day deployment of a new hire substitute to a specific site to shadow an experienced substitute.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide site based training per school site. Provide a list of critical areas to cover during the 3 day deployment so that new substitutes are given the same information regardless of the deployment site. Allot 2 hours per day of deployment to complete training in the core programs and other critical information such as programs and/or initiatives utilized by the site, site handbook, and classroom management. Require these as a condition of hire.</p> <p>Rationale: 56% of respondents said they would like on-site based training including information on discipline plans and programs and initiatives utilized by sites. It was reported that having a checklist for the substitute with a shadow would be helpful so the substitute knew what information should be shared. Also a comment was made that substitutes had to complete training on their own time and they would like to be valued. Allotting some paid training during the deployment would show that the district values its substitute teachers and that their preparation</p>

	<p>is important. Lastly, through a review of the literature on the topic of substitute teachers, I found that skills in classroom management is a large area of need Ostapczuk (1994).</p>
<p>Link to Promethean Webinars on YouTube in Substitute Classroom Resources Classroom Help and Links in Substitute Resources on the Human Resources page. There is also some information in the Teachers Lounge under Technology Support.</p>	<p>Recommendation: Provide training in technology used in the classroom such as SmartBoard and Promethean training. Have these available in the Resource Library.</p> <p>Rationale: While there is an abundance of training offered through the district website, there is no known listing of what is available, where to find it, and how to access the training.</p>

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## Appendix A-Matanuska Susitna Borough School District Website Navigation for Substitute Teachers

- Open your web browser and type in “Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District” to find the link to the district website homepage, or use this link: <https://www.matsuk12.us/>
- Once on the homepage you will see tabs to access information. These are on the top left and on the right side of the page. The tabs on the top left include About Us, School Board, Programs, Departments, and Activities. The tabs on the right include Search, Schools, Parents, Students, Employees, Community, Help, and Covid-19.
- On the top right of the page is a Home link and an account sign in link. Underneath these is a Translate pull down menu.
- There is a ticker on the left side that features current important information.
- Scroll down to see the Upcoming Events for the week and to access the Assessment, School Years, and Full View Calendars.
- Scroll down all the way to see a message from the Superintendent, Tipline link, and Facebook current posts and link.
- Near the bottom of the page are Fast Facts links including MSBSD Tipline, School Contracts, District Facts, and Online Learning.
- On the bottom of the page are links to a View Map of the district office location, Contact Us link to send an email, Accessibility information for the website, Lunch link to the School Cafe site which includes menu and student account information links, Transportation link, Jobs link, and ESEA link which is a link to district’s Federal Programs page.
- Lastly there is a link to the SiteMap for the webpage and a link to go back to the top of the page.

### Accessing Curriculum

- From the district homepage, click on the Departments tab. Click on the Instruction link to access the Instruction homepage. Scroll down and click on Instruction. In the middle of the page, click on More Information link under the Curriculum heading. From the open page you can access the available district Curriculum Frameworks, Blueprints, Calendars, and Rubrics.
- To access the curriculum for Social Emotional Learning click the Social Emotional Learning tab on the far left menu on the Instruction Homepage.

### Professional Resources

- To access overview information to some of the district’s supplemental programs for math, reading, writing, and social emotional learning, go to the Instruction Homepage and click on the Professional Resources tab in the menu on the left of the page. On the open page you can read a short summary of each program and also find a link to the program’s webpage. This is not an exhaustive list of the available programs and initiatives utilized in the district.

- You can also access the Teachers Lounge Professional Development for MSBSD Educators sign in page from the Professional Resources page. The link is at the top of the page. You will need a valid district log in to access this page. The login is your first and last initial and your employee number. Ex: AA012345.

## Employees Tab-Teachers Lounge and Teacher Links

- To find the Teachers Lounge and Employee Links click on the Employees tab on the right side of any of the district's web pages. Sometimes these will be hidden and will pop out when you hover your mouse on the right side of the page. You will need to use your district login to access much of the information on this page. You can click on the link for Teachers Lounge or Teacher Links at the top of each column on the page.

### Teachers Lounge

- Click on the Teachers Lounge link to open the homepage for the Teachers Lounge. At the top left you will see tabs for Curriculum, Programs, Assessments, and Professional Development.
- The Curriculum tab has many useful links. You can access the district curriculum, the STATE DEED website, Curriculum Counsel page, Program of Studies for both middle and high school, as well as the Sharepoint sites for District Curriculum Share. You can access a lot of information here for many of the District core programs as well as many other programs and initiatives. The curriculum share and intervention tabs will have documents that may include flipcharts and powerpoints in addition to PDF's and Word documents.
- The Programs tab is helpful when you need help with any of the programs you may be using including Learning Management Systems, Teacher Tools, Core Programs, Intervention and Extension Programs, and Supplemental Learning. To access the information for any program click on the word "support" above the icon of the program you need information about. Some of the pages will offer a menu for help options and information while others you will need to have a valid distinct login and password to access. Some of the pages are limited to teacher only access. You can also access this information by clicking on the Teacher Links link at the top of the second column of the Employee Links page.
- The Professional Development tab has links to the Fall and Summer Academies which includes a registration link and course catalog, Teacher Posts, Focused Learning Teams page which has the guidelines and other important information for creating a FLT, PD Opportunities tab which links to the PD calendar, and the Recorded Training tab.

### Recorded Training

- Click on the Employee Links tab, Click on Teachers Lounge, click the Professional Development tab on the top left of the page, scroll down to Recorded Training. You will need to sign in using your distinct login and password.



- Here you will find new teacher training for the core math k-12, and for language k-5.

### Substitute Resources

- Open the district homepage. Click on the Departments tab. Scroll down to Human Resources under the Business and Operations heading.
- This page has a lot of useful information and should be visited on a regular basis to keep up to date with the latest information. Spend some time exploring the links on the page and getting familiar with the information available here.
- Substitute Hire process and links are at the top of the page.
- You will also find a link to the latest newsletter followed by a video of the Substitute Q & A Zoom meeting hosted by the district in August to discuss the opening of schools and plan for substitute teachers for the year.
- Also on the page are links under the headings New Hire Support Paperwork, Absence Management (AESOP) Information Guides, Substitute Classroom Resources, Sub Newsletters, Sub Newsletters 2, and SubTraining Opportunities.

### Substitute Training

- On the Substitute Resources page of Human Resources you will find directions to access substitute training under the heading New Hire Support Paperwork. Scroll down to the Substitute Orientation Training-Instructions. You will be directed to log into Frontline which can be found under Employee Links.
- Once logged into Frontline you can also access optional training. Under Navigation at the top left, scroll down to Resource Library and click on it to open the library. Here you will find many helpful courses. Some of the videos you will find include Substitute Teaching 101 parts 1, 2 and 3, 4 videos on classroom management, 3 videos on instructional strategies, and videos on working with at risk youth, exceptional students, and best practices.

### School Site Information

- You can access site information two ways. Both are not inclusive of each other so you will want to access both to get all the site information you will need.
- First you can access each site's homepage. On the district homepage click on the Schools icon at the right of the page. This will open a menu of the schools. Click the tab at the top for Elementary, Middle, High, or Non-Traditional School. Click on a school to access that school's web page.
- Second, you will need to log into Sub Hub to access site information that is specifically for substitute teachers. You will need to request access to Sub Hub from the Human Resources Department Personnel Support. After you have joined Sub Hub there are 2 ways to access Sub Hub. First go to Employee Links, scroll down the first column to Google MSBSD and click on the link. If you are logged onto your web browser using your district login your Google Drive will open. Click on the waffle at the top right to open

your Google Apps. Find and click on Google Classroom. If you have joined Sub Hub it will be one of your available Google Classrooms. Click on Sub Hub to open the classroom. The other way to access Sub Hub is through the district homepage. Log into your account on the district homepage. To log in click on the Account link at the top right. Log in with your district credentials. Open a new tab on your web browser to access the waffle. Click on the Waffle to open Google Apps. Find Classroom. Click on Classroom to open your classes. Click on the Sub Hub class. Click on Classwork at the top of the page. Once Open you can scroll to find the information for the site you want information on. Each site has two links. One link contains the Instructions for Substitutes or Daily Instructions. The second link contains the Discipline Guidelines for the site. It is important to read these and become familiar with the school site prior to substitute teaching at the site.

## **Appendix-B Offering a FLT-Focused Learning Team in the MSBSD taken from the MSBSD FLT (Focused Learning Teams) page**

Guidelines for instructors include (should) holding a master's degree with additional training in the subject area as well as "assumes responsibility for the quality and relevance to teach of curriculum, topics and skills" The framework begins with submitting a resume or vita, instruction form, and course syllabus to the district for approval after a need is determined. These should be submitted at least three weeks prior to the start of the course. Once approved by the Office of Instruction, the application is forwarded to PACE, the Office of Professional and Continuing Education at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Once the course is scheduled the instructor will receive an instructor's packet with critical information for the instructor and participants. This information will have guidelines to follow before, during, and after the FLT. For more information refer to the MSBSD webpage at <https://www.matsuk12.us/Page/45010>. The path to the page is Matanuska-Susitna Borough School District Homepage, Employee Links, Teacher's Lounge, Professional Development, Focused Learning Teams. From this page you can also access How to Complete a FLT-Flowchart page.